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## Center's Head Discovers New Species

It's only a few millimeters long and lives under the bark of trees, but to Ian Swift, a beetle expert and director of the Placerita Nature Center, it's a huge find.

"It" is *Xylotrechus hovorei*, a species of beetle that Swift discovered last summer. Actually, it was Swift's colleague and mentor Frank Hovore, the former director of the nature center, who discovered the first specimens of the beetle in the Santa Gabriel mountains in the mid 1970s, but Swift was the one who did the subsequent research and found that it was in fact a distinct new species.

"Frank didn't know for sure if they were a separate species," Swift said. "It took a number of years to finally determine that it was new."

Swift spent the last few years combing museums, university libraries and journals to see if any research had been previously done, and to compare and contrast the beetle with samples of both known and unidentified species, of which there was not an abundance.

"It can be a relatively rapid process depending on the amount of material you have in front of you," Swift said. "You have to compare it to other species. If you don't have a lot of other specimens from around the area it's hard to say whether it's new, or a variation of a known species."

After writing up all his notes, findings, and evidence, Swift submitted his hypothesis for peer review to other scientists who are also experts in the study of Longhorn wood-boring beetles, the family to which *hovorei* belongs.

It passed the test. The process culminated in the publication of his paper in the July 2007 issue of the *Coleopterists Bulletin*, which made his find official.

For the curious, *Xylotrechus hovorei* is found in mountainous regions of southern California, including right here in Placerita Canyon Park.

About 14 millimeters long, it lives under the bark of live alder trees and feeds on the material between the live and dead bark sections.

Swift said that many are surprised that new species are still being discovered in this area.

"When I told my docents, they were flabbergasted," he said. "But here in L.A. County we have new species of animal being discovered even today."

People think that since the county is so big and developed, it must have already been explored."

Swift named the beetle in honor of Hovore, a fellow beetle expert who was his mentor at the Nature Center. Swift was reciprocating a compliment paid to him by Hovore, who named the beetle *Strangalia ianswifti* after him a few years back.

Hovore died last summer, right around the time Swift's report was published. He suffered a heart attack during a beetle-scouting mission in South America.

"He is sorely missed. He was a very good friend of mine," Swift said.

"However, passing away while collecting beetles is not a bad way to go."

Swift, a 2002 biology and ecology graduate of California State University, Bakersfield, also travels the world studying beetles. He is currently in the process of documenting two potential new species, including one local to the San Gabriel mountains.

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